

MUSEUM NEWS

OCTOBER

1954

NUMBER 156



THE MUSIC LESSON

GERARD TER BORCH (1617-1681)

GIFT OF EDWARD DRUMMOND LIBBEY

THE TOLEDO MUSEUM OF ART
FOUNDED BY EDWARD DRUMMOND LIBBEY

TER BORCH'S THE MUSIC LESSON

THE RISE OF Holland as a great commercial and naval power during the first quarter of the seventeenth century was marked by success in her struggle against Spanish rule and the foundation of the great commercial and financial enterprises which by 1650 made Amsterdam the market center of Europe. This new and sudden prosperity was the reward of a courageous and venturesome people small in numbers and poor in land, whose political rebellion was closely allied to strong Protestant beliefs. The growth of Holland was accompanied by another phenomenon as surprising as the strength of the nation itself. This was the sudden springing forth of a great school of painting, entirely independent from the traditional subjects of Catholic religious and courtly art to which Rubens and his school were giving a splendid new life in neighboring Flanders.

In the towns of Holland artists by the score began to paint the portrait of their country, its people and its varied life in a way that had never been done before. One group was especially occupied with the scenes of daily life to which the term "genre" has been applied, and in the earlier part of the century their subjects were mostly drawn from peasant scenes and the picturesque life of soldiers in barracks and taverns. As middle class existence became more comfortable and elegantly equipped, a more refined taste developed, and with it the quiet domestic interiors with small groups drinking, talking or playing instruments came to be an important genre type.

Gerard ter Borch stands foremost among the painters of aristocratic genre. He was born at Zwolle in 1617 where his father, who had himself done some painting, was a civic official. At the age of fifteen Gerard was sent to Amsterdam for his first studio instruction, and both there and later at Haarlem he studied with a number of genre painters more or less under the influence of Frans Hals. At eighteen he visited England for a few months at the time when Van Dyke was the center of the artistic world there and painter to the cultured tastes of the Stuart court. During the next years Ter Borch travelled extensively on the Continent, returning to Holland about 1645. For a couple of years after 1646 he worked at Munster in Germany where the nego-

tiations for the Treaty of Westphalia were taking place. Here he painted a number of the small portraits which were an important part of his work, and in 1648 he made his famous group picture of the signers of the Treaty (National Gallery, London). One of the Spanish envoys, impressed with the young Dutchman, invited him to return to Spain where he had a chance to study the work of Velasquez. It is difficult to see that the great painter of Philip IV's court had any great effect upon his already fully developed style, but Ter Borch must have found in the Spaniard's portraits and groups confirmation for his own reserved, aristocratic treatment. After this trip he returned to Holland where he lived until his death in 1681.

The Music Lesson¹ was painted in the years after the return from Spain, probably about 1675, as an identical, though slightly smaller, version was signed and dated in that year.² A somewhat different picture in the Cincinnati Art Museum has the same figure of a woman leaning forward to turn a page of the score, although here she is seen from closer up.³ This repetition of a favorite motif occurs several times in the artist's work. Our picture shows those qualities which have made Ter Borch continuously admired from his time down to our own. A man and a woman, seated at a table, pause in their music; a friend leans on a chair, listening. A quiet and pensive air surrounds the little group as the last notes die away. From an unseen source light falls on the figures, causing them to stand out in characteristic manner against the darker, dimly lighted room behind. At first glance there seems to be little color, but the woman's exquisite satin skirt, fur-trimmed gold velvet jacket and her companion's silver-braided coat are painted with such knowledge of delicate reflections and half-lights on varying textures that an extraordinary richness of subtle tones is found to exist. The brush strokes seem to fuse with one another and the play of light on rich fabrics as

1 Acc. No. 52.9; canvas; 34" x 27½". Hofstede de Groot (CATALOGUE OF DUTCH PAINTERS, V, London, 1913) refers to it under number 140 (see note 2 below) as "what appears to be an old copy" but admitted that it was heavily varnished and difficult to see at that time.

2 H de G No. 140; canvas 31" x 26". Collection of Ferdinand von Rothschild, England.

3 H de G No. 134; panel; 22" x 21½". Cincinnati Art Museum.

they animate every part of the beautifully drawn figures. This rather courtly atmosphere is rare in Dutch painting, but the air of understatement which surrounds the composition saves it from any suggestion of the ostentatious display which affected most of Dutch painting toward the end of the century.

The history of this picture is well-known from the eighteenth century when it passed through several famous French collections. It first appears in that of Jean de Jullienne (sold 1767), a great collector of Watteau. Then it passed to the

Duc de Choiseul (sold 1772), who also once owned our *Family Dinner* by Mathieu Le Nain, and thence to the Prince de Conti who sold it in 1777 to the agent of Catherine II of Russia, who at that time was engaged in building the great collection later placed in the Hermitage Gallery at St. Petersburg. In the late 1920's, along with many other noted pictures, *The Music Lesson* was sold by the Soviet Government to foreign buyers. It came to the Museum in 1952. Cleaned since the Dutch scholar Hofstede de Groot wrote, its lovely quality can be clearly seen.

COMPOSERS AND COMPOSITIONS

ANOTHER INTERESTING and impressive exhibition in the series related to music, *Composer Portraits and Autograph Scores*, will open on Sunday, October 3, and continue through November 7. About seventy-five composers from the early seventeenth century to the present will be represented, each by a composition in his own hand. Included among the many famous works are the original scores of Schubert's *Erlking*; Mozart's *Coronation Concerto*; Chopin's *Polonaise in A Flat*; Beethoven's *Sonata in G Major, Op. 96*; Brahms's *Piano Quartet in A Major*; Stravinsky's *Symphony of Psalms*, and several operas, including Debussy's *Pelleas et*

Melisande; Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana*; and Johann Strauss' *Die Fledermaus*.

Paintings, sculptures, drawings and prints, some by well-known artists, portray noted composers. The famous Beethoven portrait by Stieler is exhibited for the first time in America, and among other works of art included are, Ingres' *Portrait of Cherubini*, a Duplessis portrait of Gluck, bronze bust of Mahler by Rodin, Delacroix' drawing of Paganini, a lithograph of Wagner by Renoir, and from the Museum's own collection, the Munch lithograph of Delius.

An illustrated catalogue is available.



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OCTOBER EXHIBITIONS

Edward Drummond Libbey Centenary

IN CELEBRATION OF the 100th anniversary of the birth of Edward Drummond Libbey, the Founder of the Museum, the most important art objects which were his gift have been assembled to form an exhibition opening on October 10. In Galleries 15, 22, 23, 24, 26 and 36, and the Cloister will be shown the masterpieces of painting, sculpture, tapestry, glass, and other items, any of which would be proudly possessed by the great museums of the world.

Ann Woodruff Karras and Chris Karras

IN GALLERY 8, jewelry by Ann Woodruff Karras and paintings by her husband, Chris Karras, will be shown from October 10 to November 7. Former Toledoans, Mr. and Mrs. Karras now reside in Saginaw, Michigan. Their work has been exhibited in recent Toledo Area Artists Exhibitions as well as in numerous important shows throughout the country.

Composer Portraits and Autograph Scores

See preceding page for description. In Galleries 16, 17, 18, 19.

THE CORELLI SOCIETY OF ROME, consisting of sixteen musicians, will open the Gallery Series on Thursday evening, October 14, at 8:30. Season tickets are still available, at \$5.00 for adults and \$2.50 for students.